Rome's Persecution of the Bible

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The following is excerpted from the book ***ROME AND THE BIBLE: TRACING THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITS PERSECUTION OF THE BIBLE AND OF BIBLE BELIEVERS***.

During the period when the Roman Catholic Church was in power, she did everything she could to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people. It was illegal to translate the Bible into the common languages, even though most people could not read the official Catholic Bible because it was in Latin, a language known only to the highly educated.

Consider some of the laws Rome made against Bible translation. These began to be made in the 13th century and were in effect through the 19th.

(1) In the year 1215 Pope Innocent III issued a law commanding "that they shall be seized for trial and penalties, WHO ENGAGE IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE SACRED VOLUMES, or who hold secret conventicles, or who assume the office of preaching without the authority of their superiors; against whom process shall be commenced, without any permission of appeal" (J.P. Callender, *Illustrations of Popery*, 1838, p. 387). Innocent "declared that as by the old law, the beast touching the holy mount was to be stoned to death, so simple and uneducated men were not to touch the Bible or venture to preach its doctrines" (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VI, p. 723).

(2) The Council of Toulouse (1229) FORBADE THE LAITY TO POSSESS OR READ THE VERNACULAR TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE (Allix, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, p. 213). This council ordered that the bishops should appoint in each parish "one priest and two or three laics, who should engage upon oath to make a rigorous search after all heretics and their abettors, and for this purpose should visit every house from the garret to the cellar, together with all subterraneous places where they might conceal themselves" (Thomas M'Crie, *History of the Reformation in Spain*, 1856, p. 82). They also searched for the illegal Bibles.

(3) The Council of Tarragona (1234) "ORDERED ALL VERNACULAR VERSIONS TO BE BROUGHT TO THE BISHOP TO BE BURNED" (Paris Simms, *Bible from the Beginning*, p. 1929, 162).

(4) In 1483 the infamous Inquisitor General Thomas Torquemada began his reign of terror as head of the Spanish Inquisition; King Ferdinand and his queen "PROHIBITED ALL, UNDER THE SEVEREST PAINS, FROM TRANSLATING THE SACRED SCRIPTURE INTO THE VULGAR TONGUES, OR FROM USING IT WHEN TRANSLATED BY OTHERS" (M'Crie, p. 192). For more than three centuries the Bible in the common tongue was a forbidden book in Spain and multitudes of copies perished in the flames, together with

those who cherished them.

(5) In England, too, laws were passed by the Catholic authorities against vernacular Bibles. The Constitutions of Thomas Arundel, issued in 1408 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, made this brash demand: "WE THEREFORE DECREE AND ORDAIN THAT NO MAN SHALL, HEREAFTER, BY HIS OWN AUTHORITY, TRANSLATE ANY TEXT OF THE SCRIPTURE INTO ENGLISH, OR ANY OTHER TONGUE, by way of a book, libel, or treatise, now lately set forth in the time of John Wyckliff, or since, or hereafter to be set forth, in part of in whole, privily or apertly, upon pain of greater excommunication, until the said translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place, or, if the case so require, by the council provincial" (John Eadie, *The English Bible*, vol. 1, 1876, p. 89). Consider Arundel's estimation of the man who gave the English speaking people their first Bible: "This pestilential and most wretched John Wycliffe of damnable memory, a child of the old devil, and himself a child or pupil of Anti-Christ, who while he lived, walking in the vanity of his mind ... crowned his wickedness by translating the Scriptures into the mother tongue" (Fountain, *John Wycliffe*, p. 45).

(6) Pope Leo X (1513-1521), who railed against Luther's efforts to follow the biblical precept of faith alone and Scripture alone, called the fifth Lateran Council (1513-1517), which charged that no books should be printed except those approved by the Roman Catholic Church. "THEREFORE FOREVER THEREAFTER NO ONE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO PRINT ANY BOOK OR WRITING WITHOUT A PREVIOUS EXAMINATION, TO BE TESTIFIED BY MANUAL SUBSCRIPTION, BY THE PAPAL VICAR AND MASTER OF THE SACRED PALACE IN ROME, and in other cities and dioceses by the Inquisition, and the bishop or an expert appointed by him. FOR NEGLECT OF THIS THE PUNISHMENT WAS EXCOMMUNICATION, THE LOSS OF THE EDITION, WHICH WAS TO BE BURNED, a fine of 100 ducats to the fabric of St. Peters, and suspension from business for a year" (Henry Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*).

(7) These restrictions were repeated by the Council of Trent in 1546, which placed translations of the Bible, such as the German, Spanish, and English, on its list of prohibited books and forbade any person to read the Bible without a license from a Catholic bishop or inquisitor.

Following is a quote from Trent: "...IT SHALL NOT BE LAWFUL FOR ANYONE TO PRINT OR TO HAVE PRINTED ANY BOOKS WHATSOEVER DEALING WITH SACRED DOCTRINAL MATTERS WITHOUT THE NAME OF THE AUTHOR, OR IN THE FUTURE TO SELL THEM, OR EVEN TO HAVE THEM IN POSSESSION, UNLESS THEY HAVE FIRST BEEN EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE ORDINARY, UNDER PENALTY OF ANATHEMA AND FINE prescribed by the last Council of the Lateran" (Fourth session, April 8, 1546, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Translated by H.J. Schroeder, pp. 17-19).

These rules were affixed to the Index of Prohibited Books and were constantly reaffirmed by popes in the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. These prohibitions, in fact, have never been rescinded. It is true that the Council of Trent did not absolutely forbid the reading of the Scriptures under all circumstances. It allowed a few exceptions. The priests were allowed to read the Latin Bible. Bishops and inquisitors were allowed to grant license for certain faithful Catholics to read the Scriptures in Latin as long as these Scriptures were accompanied by Catholic notes and if it was believed that these would not be "harmed" by such reading. *In practice, though, the proclamations of Trent forbade the reading of the Holy Scriptures to at least nine-tenths of the people*. Rome's claim to possess authority to determine who can and cannot translate, publish, and read the Bible is one of the most blasphemous claims ever made under this sun.

The attitude of 16th century Catholic authorities toward the Bible was evident from a speech Richard Du Mans delivered at Trent, in which he said "that *the Scriptures had become useless*, since the schoolmen had established the truth of all doctrines; and though they were formerly read in the church, for the instruction of the people, and still read in the service, yet *they ought not to be made a study, because the Lutherans only gained those who read them*" (William M'Gavin, *The Protestant*, 1846, p. 144). It is true that the Bible leads men away from Roman Catholicism, but this is only because Roman Catholicism is not founded upon the Word of God!

Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605) confirmed the Council of Trent's proclamations against Bible translations (Eadie, *History of the English Bible*, II, p. 112) and went even further by forbidding licenses to be granted for the reading of the Bible under any conditions (Richard Littledale, *Plain Reasons Against Joining the Church of Rome*, 1924, p. 91).

(8) The restrictions against ownership of the vernacular Scriptures were repeated by the popes until the end of the 19th century:

Benedict XIV (1740-1758) confirmed the Council of Trent's proclamations against Bible translations (Eadie, *History of the English Bible*, II, p. 112) and issued an injunction "that no versions whatever should be suffered to be read but those which should be approved of by the Holy See, accompanied by notes derived from the writings of the Holy Fathers, or other learned and Catholic authors" (D.B. Ray, *The Papal Controversy*, p. 479).

It was during the reign of **Pope Pius VII** (1800-1823) that the modern Bible society movement began. The British and Foreign Bible Society was formed in March 1804, the purpose being "to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment." Other societies were soon created for the same exalted purpose. Germany (1804); Ireland (1806); Canada (1807); Edinburgh (1809); Hungary (1811); Finland, Glasgow, Zurich, Prussia (1812); Russia (1813); Denmark and Sweden (1814); Netherlands, Iceland (1815); America, Norway, and Waldensian (1816); Australia, Malta, Paris (1817); etc. One of the societies began distributing a Polish Bible in Poland. The Pope, instead of praising the Lord that the eternal Word of God was being placed into the hands of the multitudes of spiritually needy people, showed his displeasure by issuing a bull against Bible Societies on June 29, 1816. The Pope expressed himself as "shocked" by the circulation of the Scriptures in the Polish tongue. He characterized this practice as a "most crafty device, by which the very foundations of religion are undermined," "a pestilence," which he must "remedy and abolish," "a defilement of the faith, eminently dangerous to souls." Pope Pius VII also rebuked Archbishop Buhusz of Mohiley in Russia because of his endorsement of a newly formed Bible society (Kenneth Latourette, *The Nineteenth Century in Europe*, p. 448). The papal brief, dated September 3, 1816, declared that "if the Sacred Scriptures were allowed in the vulgar tongue everywhere without discrimination, more detriment than benefit would arise" (Jacobus, *Roman Catholic and Protestant Versions Compared*, p. 236).

Pope Leo XII (1823-29) issued a bull to the Bishops in Ireland, May 3, 1824, in which he affirmed the Council of Trent and condemned Bible distribution. "It is no secret to you, venerable brethren, that a certain Society, vulgarly called The Bible Society, is audaciously spreading itself through the whole world. After despising the traditions of the holy Fathers, and in opposition to the well-known Decree of the Council of Trent, this Society has collected all its forces, and directs every means to one object,--the translation, or rather the perversion, of the Bible into the vernacular languages of all nations. ... IF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES BE EVERYWHERE INDISCRIMINATELY PUBLISHED, MORE EVIL THAN ADVANTAGE WILL ARISE THENCE, on account of the rashness of men" (Bull of Leo XII, May 3, 1824; cited from Charles Elliott, *Delineation of Roman Catholicism*, 1851, p. 21). This Pope re-published the Index of Prohibited Books on March 26, 1825, and mandated that the decrees of the Council of Trent be enforced against distribution of

Scriptures (R.P. Blakeney, *Popery in Its Social Aspect*, p. 137).

Pope Gregory XVI (1831-46) ratified the decrees of his predecessors, forbidding the free distribution of Scripture. In his encyclical of May 8, 1844, this Pope stated: "Moreover, we confirm and renew the decrees recited above, DELIVERED IN FORMER TIMES BY APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY, AGAINST THE PUBLICATION, DISTRIBUTION, READING, AND POSSESSION OF BOOKS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES TRANSLATED INTO THE VULGAR TONGUE" (James Wylie, *The Papacy*, 1867, p. 182). This encyclical was delivered against Bible societies in general, and mentioned in particular the Christian Alliance, which was formed in 1843 in New York for the purpose of distributing Scriptures.

Pope Pius IX (1846-78) in November 1846 issued an encyclical letter in which he denounced all opponents of Roman Catholicism, among which he included "those insidious Bible Societies." He said the Bible societies were "renewing the crafts of the ancient heretics" by distributing to "all kinds of men, even the least instructed, gratuitously and at immense expense, copies in vast numbers of the books of the Sacred Scriptures translated against the holiest rules of the Church into various vulgar tongues..." What a horrible crime! Distributing the Scriptures freely to all people! It was Pius IX who had himself and his fellow popes declared "infallible" at the Vatican I Council in 1870.

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) published an "Apostolic Constitution" in 1897 which stated: "All versions of the vernacular, even by Catholics, are altogether prohibited, unless approved by the Holy See, or published under the vigilant care of the Bishops, with annotations taken from the Fathers of the Church and learned Catholic writers" (Melancthon Jacobus, *Roman Catholic and Protestant Bibles*, p. 237).

Where the Roman Catholic Church held power the Bible was always scarce. Consider a few examples: When the government of New Orleans was taken over in 1803, "it was not till after a long search for a Bible to administer the oath of office that a Latin Vulgate was at last procured from a priest" (William Canton, *The Bible and the Anglo-Saxon People*, I, p. 245). In Quebec, as late as 1826, MANY PEOPLE HAD NEVER HEARD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (Canton, II, 61). The situation was the same in South America, where "for about three centuries, were almost entirely without the Bible." It was 1831 before the first Bible was printed in Spanish America, and even then the copies were exorbitantly expensive (Canton, II, 347). Thus, even when Catholic authorities finally printed some Bibles, they were priced far beyond the reach of most people. Between December 1907 and February 1908 a diligent search was made to determine how many Bibles were available in Catholic Ireland. Not a portion of the Bible was available in bookshops in Athlone, Balbriggan, Drogheda, Mullingar, Wexford, and Clonmel. A shop assistant at Mullingar said, "I never saw a Catholic Bible." When asked about the New Testament, a sales person at the The Catholic Truth Society replied, "We don't keep it." Those who did the extensive survey concluded "that IN NINE TENTHS OF THE CITIES, TOWNS, AND VILLAGES OR IRELAND A ROMAN CATHOLIC COULD NOT PROCURE A COPY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BIBLE OR NEW TESTAMENT" (Alexander Robertson, *The Papal Conquest*, 1909, pp. 166-167).

These facts uncover only the tip of iceberg in regard to Rome's attitude toward the Bible in former times. Our book "Rome and the Bible: The History of the Bible through the Centuries and Rome's Persecution against It" documents this more extensively. It is available from Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 61368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org.

THE WALDENSES (also called Vaudois or Albigenses) are an example of what occurred during this period. They lived in the mountains of Italy and France and eventually spread throughout Europe; they refused to join the Catholic Church or recognize the Pope. They received the Bible as the sole source for faith and practice and had their own translations, which they diligently reproduced in hand-written copies. Rome persecuted the Waldenses throughout the Dark Ages up until the 18th century.

A few brief descriptions of the persecutions against the Waldenses follow. Note that many entire books have been written about these persecutions and the following facts only hint at the destruction and torment poured out upon these people. [For more information, the reader's attention is invited to the *Fundamental Baptist CD-Rom Library*, which contains dozens of rare antiquarian Baptist and Waldensian histories, including *Baptist History* by John M. Cramp (1852), *The Story of the Baptists in All Ages and Countries* by Richard Cook (1888), *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs* by J. Newton Brown (1854), *A History of the Baptists* by Thomas Armitage (1890), *A History of the Christian Church (Waldenses)* by William Jones (1819), *History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and Albigenses* by Pierre Allix (1690, 1692), *A History of the Waldenses* by J.A. Wylie (1860), and *A History of the Ancient Christians of the Valleys of the Alps* by Perrin (1618). The *Fundamental Baptist CD-Rom Library* is available from Way of Life Literature, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org.]

12TH CENTURY

The Roman Catholic Church persecuted Peter Waldo and refused to accept his translation of the New Testament into the Romaunt language. Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) expelled Waldo and his followers from his diocese, and the next pope, Lucius III, put his papal curse upon them (William Blackburn, *History of the Christian Church*, 1880, pp. 309, 310). The Council of Tours in 1163 promoted inquisition against Bible believers, issuing a decree that stated: "No man must presume to receive or assist heretics, nor in buying or selling have any thing to do with them, that being thus deprived of the comforts of humanity, they may be compelled to repent of the error of their way" (Gideon Ouseley, *A Short Defence of the Old Religion*, 1821, p. 221). "Many Albigenses, refusing the terms, were burnt in different cities in the south of France" (G.H. Orchard, *A Concise History of the Baptists*, 1855, p. 199). The Third Lateran Council "gave permission to princes to reduce heretics to slavery and shortened the time of penance by two years for those taking up arms against them" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, V, p. 519).

13TH CENTURY

In the year 1209, Pope Innocent III called for a crusade against the Waldenses in France. Anyone who volunteered to war against the "heretics" (so called by Rome because they dissented from her dogmas) was promised forgiveness of sin and many rewards. Tens of thousands took up arms for the Pope and marched against the hated Waldenses. Some 200,000 dissenters were killed by the Pope's army within a few months. Two large cities, Beziers (Braziers) and Carcasone, were destroyed, together with many smaller towns and villages. The war was conducted for 20 years! Thousands were made homeless and were forced to wander in the woods and mountains to escape their tormentors. The cruelties practiced by the Catholic persecutors were horrible. The Christians were thrown from high cliffs, hanged, disemboweled, pierced through repeatedly, drowned, torn by dogs, burned alive, crucified. In one case, 400 mothers fled for refuge with their babies to a cave in Castelluzzo, which was located 2,000 feet above the valley in which they lived. They were discovered by the rampaging Catholics; a large fire was built outside of the cave and they were suffocated.

15TH CENTURY

In 1487 Pope Innocent VIII called for a crusade against the Waldenses in Italy, Germany, and elsewhere. He promised forgiveness of sins and a share in the plunder to those who joined. Charles VIII of France and Charles II of Savoy agreed to raise an army for the destruction of the Waldenses. This regular army numbered about 18,000 soldiers and thousands of "ruffians" joined, urged on by the promise of forgiveness of sins and the expectation of obtaining spoil from the Waldensian possessions. Wylie describes these volunteers as "ambitious fanatics, reckless pillagers, merciless assassins" (James Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, 1860, p. 29). This army attacked the Waldensian mountain valleys in northern Italy simultaneously from the plains to the south and from France to the west. Thousands of Bible-believing Christians perished in this crusade. Their homes and crops were destroyed. Many entire villages were razed. Their women were raped and then viciously murdered. Their children were dashed against trees and thrown off cliffs. More than 3,000 Waldensian Christians, men, women, and children, perished in one cave called Aigue-Froid to which they had fled for safety. These were the inhabitants of the entire village of Val Loyse, and the property of these pitiful people was distributed to the participants of the crusade. Many entire large valleys were burned and pillaged and depopulated. This crusade against the Waldensians lasted for a year.

16TH CENTURY

Following is a brief description of the persecutions in the 16th century as given by a Waldensian pastor: "There is no town in Piedmont under a Vaudois pastor, where some of our brethren have not been put to death ... Hugo Chiamps of Finestrelle had his entrails torn from his living body, at Turin. Peter Geymarali of Bobbio, in like manner, had his entrails taken out at Lucerna, and a fierce cat thrust in their place to torture him further; Maria Romano was buried alive at Rocco-patia; Magdalen Foulano underwent the same fate at San Giovanni; Susan Michelini was bound hand and foot, and left to perish of cold and hunger at Saracena. Bartholomew Fache, gashed with sabres, had the wounds filled up with quicklime, and perished thus in agony at Fenile; Daniel Michelini had his tongue torn out at Bobbio for having praised God. James Baridari perished covered with sulphurous matches, which had been forced into his flesh under the nails, between the fingers, in the nostrils, in the lips, and over all his body, and then lighted. Daniel Revelli had his mouth filled with gunpowder, which, being lighted, blew his head to pieces. Maria Monnen, taken at Liousa, had the flesh cut from her cheek and chin bone, so that her jaw was left bare, and she was thus left to perish. Paul Garnier was slowly sliced to pieces at Rora. Thomas Margueti was mutilated in an indescribable manner at Miraboco, and Susan Jaquin cut in bits at La Torre. Sara Rostagnol was slit open from the legs to the bosom, and so left to perish on the road between Eyral and Lucerna. Anne Charbonnier was impaled and carried thus on a pike, as a standard, from San Giovanni to La Torre. Daniel Rambaud, at Paesano, had his nails torn off, then his fingers chopped off, then his feet and his hands, then his arms and his legs, with each successive refusal on his part to abjure the Gospel" (Alex Muston, *A History of the Waldenses: The Israel of the Alps*, 1866).

Not only were the Waldensian Christians themselves destroyed wherever the armies could gain ascendancy, but their literature and vernacular Scriptures were destroyed with a vengeance during these persecutions. The Catholic priests who accompanied the armies made certain of this. So many copies of the Waldensian Scriptures were destroyed that we have little information about their Bibles.

In the 17th century, Samuel Morland visited the Waldenses in northern Italy as the representative of England's ruler, Oliver Cromwell. Morland tried to assist the Waldenses in the bitter persecutions that were still being poured out upon them. Entire armies had been sent to destroy the Waldensian villages in the 17th century. Practically all of their documents had been destroyed. Morland gathered up any

remaining materials he could find and in 1658 sent them back to England to be deposited in the library at the University of Cambridge. The Morland collections are still available. On June 2, 2004, Miss J.S. Ringrose, Deputy Keeper of Manuscripts at University Library, Cambridge, wrote to Justin Savino, a student at Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary, Newington, Connecticut, as follows: "There are two main collections of Waldensian manuscripts, both deposited by Samuel Morland in 1658. MSS Dd. 3. 25-38 (Morland MSS G-V) are seventeenth century manuscripts, mainly transcripts of earlier historical sources. MSS. Dd. 15.29-34 (Morland A-F) are medieval." The Morland F packet contains manuscripts from the 14th century with the entire New Testament and parts of the Old and apocryphal writings "in the Peidemontese dialect of Provencal or Occitan." On a visit to the library in April 2005 I examined the F packet. It contains six small items, including a New Testament (though not containing all of the books).

CONSIDER SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW THE BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED BY ROME:

THE ENGLISH BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

JOHN WYCLIFFE (1324-1384), the father of the English Bible, is an example of how Rome treated the Bible in these days.

Wycliffe, the vicar of St. Mary's Church at Lutterworth, completed the English New Testament in 1380 and the Old Testament in 1382. He rejected many of Rome's heresies, including the doctrine that the people should not have the Bible in their own language. Here is one of the powerful statements that he made to the Catholic authorities: "You say it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English. You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the Church of God is in danger from this book. How can that be? Is it not from the Bible only that we learn that God has set up such a society as a Church on the earth? Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the Church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn who is the Builder and Sovereign of the Church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible, what charter has the Church to show for all these? It is you who place the Church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoins" (David Fountain, *John Wycliffe*, pp. 45-47).

Rome persecuted Wycliffe bitterly and attempted unsuccessfully to have him imprisoned. Pope Gregory XI issued five bulls against Wycliffe, but he was protected by the Queen of England and others.

Wycliffe died on December 31, 1384, and forty-three years later, in 1428, the Roman Catholic Church dug up Wycliffe's bones and burned them.

Rome also persecuted Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, imprisoning them and putting many of them to death. The Lollards' Tower in London was so named because it is one of the places where they were imprisoned and tortured. It was illegal to own a copy of the Wycliffe Bible, and most of the priceless handwritten Scriptures were burned.

WILLIAM TYNDALE (1484-1536), the first to translate the English Bible from Greek and Hebrew, is another example of Rome's persecutions.

As a young man Tyndale had a burden to translate the Bible into English directly from the Hebrew and Greek so that his people could have the Word of God from the purest fountains. When he expressed this plan to Catholic authorities in England, then under Roman Catholic rule, he learned that it would not be possible to do this work in his own country.

While employed at Little Sodbury Manor after graduation from Oxford, Tyndale preached in that part of western England and debated the truth with Catholic priests. One evening a priest exclaimed, "We are better without God's laws than the pope's." Hearing that, Tyndale replied: "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou doest."

Tyndale traveled to Europe to pursue this objective, where he had to move from place to place and hide his work from the ecclesiastical authorities.

After completing the New Testament and a portion of the Old, Tyndale was arrested in May 1535. He was imprisoned for 16 months in the castle at Vilvorde, Belgium.

On October 6, 1536, Tyndale was strangled and then burned at the stake. His ashes were thrown into the river that flowed alongside the castle.

THE GERMAN BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

The **PRE-LUTHER GERMAN BIBLES** were persecuted in the 15th century. The first complete printed Bible in German was published by Johann Mentelin (John Mentel) at Strassburg in 1466 (Olaf Norlie, *The Translated Bible*, 1934, p. 73). Mainz was the most active publication center in Germany at that time, and in 1485, the archbishop there issued AN EDICT PRESCRIBING CENSORSHIP FOR ALL TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE. The edict forbade the Scriptures to be given to simple and unlearned men and to women. Following is an excerpt: "We have observed books containing the office of the mass and also containing divine things and lofty matters of our religion and translated from Latin into the German language, not without damage to religion [meaning the Catholic religion!], circulating among the hands of the vulgar [common people] ... for who will give to the ignorant and unlettered persons, and to the female sex at that, into whose hands the manuscripts of sacred learning should fall, the ability to find the true sense? No sane person would deny that the texts of the Holy Gospels and of the Epistles of Paul require many additions and explanations from other writings."

THE LUTHER BIBLE, which first appeared in 1522, was also fiercely persecuted.

D'Aubigne, in his *History of the Reformation*, describes how Rome replied to this milestone in Germany history: "Ignorant priests shuddered at the thought that every citizen, nay every peasant, would now be able to dispute with them on the precepts of our Lord. The King of England denounced the work to the Elector Frederick and to Duke George of Saxony. But as early as the month of November THE DUKE HAD ORDERED HIS SUBJECTS TO DEPOSIT EVERY COPY OF LUTHER'S NEW TESTAMENT IN THE HANDS OF THE MAGISTRATES. BAVARIA, BRANDENBURG, AUSTRIA, AND ALL THE STATES DEVOTED TO ROME, PUBLISHED SIMILAR DECREES. IN SOME PLACES THEY MADE SACRILEGIOUS BONFIRES OF THESE SACRED BOOKS IN THE PUBLIC PLACES"

(D'Aubigne, III, p. 77).

Persecutions were poured out by the Catholic authorities upon those who read the works of Luther. An example of those who were tormented for distributing the German Luther New Testament was a bookseller named John in Buda, Hungary. He had circulated the German Scriptures throughout that country. "He was bound to a stake; his persecutors then piled his books around him, enclosing him as if in a tower, and then set fire to them. John manifested unshaken courage, exclaiming from the midst of the flames, that he was delighted to suffer in the cause of the Lord" (D'Aubigne, III, p. 152).

In 1520 a strict search for Lutheran Bibles and books was instigated in Venice, and those found were destroyed (M'Crie, *Reformation in Italy*, p. 28).

The **ANABAPTIST LUTHERAN BIBLES** were persecuted.

The German Bible produced by Anabaptists appeared in 1529, five years before the entire Luther Bible. It was called THE WORMS BIBLE, after the name of the city in which it was published. The translation was done by two Anabaptists, Ludwig Hetzer and Hans Denck, "accomplished scholars, thoroughly versed in Hebrew and Greek, as well as in Latin. Denck studied and received the degree of Master at the University of Basel, under and with Erasmus, Hetzer was an alumnus of Basel, and also of the University of Paris" (John Porter, *The World's Debt to the Baptists*, 1914, p. 138). "At the time of its publication the approval of the Denck-Hetzer edition was unlimited and universal. Within three years thirteen separate editions appeared at Strasburg, Augsburg, Hagenau, and other places. ... In a word, in all Germany the book of the despised Anabaptists was bought, read, and treasured" (Ludwig Keller, *Hans Denck, Ein Apostel der Wiedertaufer*, p. 211; cited by Porter, p. 139).

This German Bible and its translators suffered the fate we have seen so many times already. "Denck, suffering with tuberculosis, under the decree of banishment and outlawry, died in hiding, in Basel, in 1529, a little before the Bible came from the press. Hetzer was arrested, condemned as a heretic, and beheaded the same year at Constance. ... EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT WAS MADE TO SUPPRESS THIS 'HERETIC BIBLE;' PRINTING OFFICES, PLACES WHERE THE BOOK WAS FOR SALE, PRIVATE HOUSES AND INDIVIDUALS WERE SEARCHED, AND ALL COPIES FOUND WERE DESTROYED. Only three copies that are accessible to scholars are now known to be in existence, one is in the library in the University of Bonn, one in a library in Stuttgart, and one in the New York Public Library" (Porter, p. 139).

THE SPANISH BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

In the fifteenth century a Roman Catholic priest named **BONIFACIO FERRER** translated the whole Scriptures into the Valencian or Catalonian dialect of Spain. He died in 1417, but his translation was printed in Valencia in 1478. In spite of the fact that it was produced by a Catholic, "it had scarcely made its appearance when it was suppressed by the Inquisition, who ordered the whole impression to be devoured by the flames. So strictly was this order carried into execution, that scarcely a single copy appears to have escaped" (M'Crie, *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain*, 1829, pp. 191, 92). In 1645 four leaves of this translation were discovered in a monastery.

In 1543 the **FRANCISCO DE ENZINAS** Spanish New Testament was published with the title "The New Testament, that is, the New Covenant of our Only Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ, translated from the Greek to the Castillian [Spanish] language." Enzinas presented a copy of his New Testament to Charles V, Emperor of the Roman Empire (1519-1558), during the emperor's visit to Brussels, who gave it to his Catholic confessor, Pedro de Soto. "After various delays, Enzinas, having waited on the confessor, was upbraided by him as an enemy to religion, who had tarnished the honor of his native country; and refusing to acknowledge a fault, was seized by the officers of justice and thrown into prison" (M'Crie, *History of the Reformation in Spain*, pp. 194-95). Francisco's father and uncles visited him in prison and reproached him for dishonoring his family. After fifteen months' confinement he miraculously escaped prison in Brussels and fled to Antwerp, then on to England, where, in 1548, he was given the chair of Greek at Cambridge. He returned to the continent in 1550 and died of the plague at Strasbourg in 1553. Most of his New Testaments were burned and all of his manuscripts were destroyed by the Inquisition.

Another man who was raised up by God to provide the Spanish world with a vernacular Bible was **JUAN PEREZ DE PINEDA** (c. 1490-1567). In Seville, Spain, as the head of the College of Doctrine, he began to study the Bible and rejected Roman Catholic doctrine. When persecution began against the believers in that area, Perez and some of his friends were able to flee from Spain. Perez settled in Geneva and was the first to form a Spanish church in that city (M'Crie, p. 363). Afterwards he moved to France. His translation of the New Testament into Spanish, relying heavily on the Enzinas version, was published in 1556 in Geneva.

Another of the men who fled Spain's inquisition terrors was **CASSIODORO DE REINA** (1520-1594). As a monk in the San Isidro del Campo monastery in Seville he joined the Protestant revival and rejected Catholic doctrine. Arrested and sentenced to death, Reina was able to escape from prison and flee to London, where he preached to a Spanish congregation (Lupton, *A History of the Geneva Bible*, I, p. 40). Later he journeyed to Geneva and associated with the Protestant Spanish church there, pastored by the aforementioned Juan Perez de Pineda. In 1567 Reina completed a Spanish New Testament that "is hailed to this day as the greatest literary triumph in Spanish history." Reina settled in Basle, and the entire Bible appeared in 1569.

Reina's work was taken over by **CIPRIANO DE VALERA** (1532-1602?).

Like Enzinas and Reina, Valera had fled the inquisition in Spain. In 1565 Valera joined Oxford University and became well known for his linguistic expertise, "having mastered at least ten languages." He revised and corrected Reina's work and published the New Testament in London in 1596, and, the entire Bible in 1602 in Amsterdam.

All of these Spanish Bibles "were accompanied with vindications of the practice of translating the scriptures into vernacular languages, and the right of the people to read them" (M'Crie, p. 202).

What a contrast this was with the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church. As late as 1747, the inquisitor general in Spain fretted that "some men carried their audacity to the execrable extreme of asking permission to read the sacred scriptures in the vulgar tongue, not afraid of finding in them the most deadly poison" (M'Crie, p. 202, f3).

Pope Julius III addressed a bull to the inquisitors in 1550 in which he warned them of the Spanish Bibles which were being smuggled into the country (M'Crie, *History of the Reformation in Spain*, p. 203). The inquisitors were given instructions "to seize all the copies,

and proceed with the utmost rigour against those who should retain them, without excepting members of universities, colleges or monasteries. ... At the same time the strictest precautions were adopted to prevent the importation of such books by placing officers at all the sea-ports and land-passes, with authority to search every package, and the person of every traveller that should enter the kingdom" (M'Crie, p. 204).

THE FRENCH BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

JACQUES LEFEVRE (1455-1536), a professor at the University of Paris, published a French New Testament in 1523 and the complete French Bible in 1528. For his labor of love for the French people, the elderly Lefevre was hated and persecuted by the Romanist authorities.

One thing that galled them was Lafevre's principle that all Christians should read the Scriptures. One of these angry authorities exclaimed: "Does he not dare to recommend all the faithful to read the Scriptures? Does he not tell therein that whoever loves not Christ's Word is not a Christian; and that the Word of God is sufficient to lead to eternal life?" (D'Aubigne, III, p. 385).

The Sorbonne, the theological faculty of the University of Paris, condemned Lefevre as a heretic and he was forced to flee to Strasbourg in 1525. In 1531, Lefevre took refuge in southern France and remained there till his death..." (Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, VI, p. 502).

The Sorbonne declared war on printing and printers. In 1534, twenty men and one woman were burnt alive. One of those was a printer whose sole crime was printing some of Luther's writings, while another was a bookseller who had sold the same.

An edict was issued in 1546 by the Roman Catholic authorities against Lefevre and his work, in which the following statement is found: "It is neither expedient nor useful for the Christian public that any translation of the Bible should be permitted to be printed; but that they ought to be suppressed as injurious." It was also ordered that any person possessing a copy of it should deliver it up within eight days (John Beardslee, *The Bible among the Nations*, 1899, pp. 211, 12).

Many French believers were burned for distributing the Bible. Foxe's unabridged Martyrology is a massive set of books. I own a copy of the 8th edition, which was printed in 1641. It is 3 volumes folio, 3227 pages, the three volumes together almost one foot in width, and each page 9 X 13.5 inches. Roughly 150 of these large pages are dedicated to an enumeration of just *some* of the French martyrs. Following are a few examples:

In 1925 a Gospel preacher named Schuch was burned in the town of Nancy in France. When he was arrested and tried, he had his Bible with him, and holding the same as he stood before his accusers, he preached to them out of the Scriptures and "meekly yet forcibly confessed Christ crucified." His words so incised his tormentors that "transported with rage, they rushed upon him with violent cries, TORE AWAY THE BIBLE FROM WHICH HE WAS READING THIS MENACING LANGUAGE, and like mad dogs, unable to bite his doctrine, THEY BURNT IT in their convent." The man was immediately condemned to be burned alive, and the sentence was quickly carried out. "On the 19th of August 1525 the whole city of Nancy was in motion. The bells were tolling for the death of a heretic. The mournful procession set out. When the martyr reached the place of execution, HIS BOOKS WERE BURNT BEFORE HIS FACE; he was

then called upon to retract; but he refused, saying, “It is thou, O God, who hast called me, and thou wilt give me strength unto the end.” Having mounted the pile, he continued to recite the psalm until the smoke and the flames stifled his voice” (D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, III, pp. 468, 69).

In 1546 Peter Chapot was burned to death for bringing French Bibles into France and for selling them. Because of his bold testimony at the place of persecution, a decree was made that “all which were to be burned, unless they recanted at the fire, should have their tongues cut off. Which law diligently afterward was observed” (Foxe, unabridged, 1641, II, p. 133).

Stephen Polliot was also arrested in 1546 with a bag of Scriptures and Gospel books he was distributing. His tongue was cut out and he was burned, “his satchel of books hanging about his neck” (Foxe, unabridged, II, p. 134).

Nicholas Nayle, a shoemaker, was arrested in Paris and burned in 1553 for bringing parcels of books to distribute among the believers.

In 1554 Dionysius Vayre, who had smuggled many books into France, was arrested in Normandy and sentenced to be “burned alive, and thrice lifted up, and let down again into the fire” (Foxe, unabridged, II, p. 145).

Waldensian bookseller Bartholmew Hector was arrested in 1556. When the Inquisition judge said, “You have been caught in the act of selling books that contain heresy; what say you?” Hector replied, “If the Bible is heresy to you, it is truth to me.” After languishing in prison for several months, Hector was burned at the stake.

THE DUTCH BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

In 1270 **JACOB VAN MAERLANDT** completed the four Gospels in Dutch. “This effort aroused the wrath of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Utrecht, who thought it was disrespectful to the Scriptures thus to bring them within the reach of the common people, and Van Maerlandt nearly lost his life as a reward for his labor” (John Beardslee, *The Bible among the Nations*, p. 175).

In 1526 the first entire Bible in Dutch was published by **JACOB VAN LIESVELDT** in Antwerp, and 20 years later Liesveldt was beheaded in Antwerp “for his printing labours” (Lupton, *A History of the Geneva Bible*, I, p. 35).

THE ITALIAN BIBLE WAS PERSECUTED

ANTONIO BRUCIOLI published an Italian New Testament at Venice in 1530 and an entire Bible two years later. Brucioli also produced a commentary on the whole Bible, which was published in seven volumes. “His translations of the Bible were put into the first class of forbidden books, and all his works, on whatever subject, ‘published or to be published,’ together with all books which came from his press, even after his death, were strictly prohibited. ... violent measures were afterwards employed for its suppression” (M'Crie, *Reformation in Italy*, 1856, pp. 56, 57).